

# User research glossary



# Introduction

User research is a process of gathering information about users, their needs, behaviours, and preferences to inform the design of products, services, or experiences.

There are a range of user research approaches that are suited to different situations and objectives. The primary goal of user research is to gain a deep understanding of the target audience so that designers, developers, and other stakeholders can create solutions and strategies that meet user needs and expectations effectively.

## Why it's important to understand user research terminology

- **Understanding user needs:** User research reveals your audience's goals, needs, and pain points, helping you solve real problems and deliver genuine value.
- **Improving usability:** Research identifies issues that frustrate users and erode trust. It also uncovers how disabled users experience your website or service, which is vital insight for your charity.
- **Increasing engagement and satisfaction:** By understanding what motivates your audience, you can design experiences that meet expectations, boost satisfaction, and build loyal advocates for your charity.
- **Minimising risk:** Early and ongoing research highlights issues before they become costly. It ensures your strategies align with user needs and helps prioritise the features or services that matter most.

## User research is vital for any product or service.

It helps your charity make informed decisions, design experiences that resonate with users, and achieve your mission more effectively. By understanding your audience, you build loyalty and amplify your impact in the community.

# User Research Glossary of terms

**A/B testing:** A controlled experiment where two or more versions of a product are tested to determine which performs better.

**Accessibility:** Ensuring that a product can be used by individuals with disabilities.

**Audience interviews:** A one-to-one session during which you ask the user questions and record or note down their answers. These are sometimes referred to as user interviews.

**Card sorting:** A research method that asks users to sort sets of information into groups that make sense to them. Used to understand how users categorise and organise information or content, and what language resonates with them.

**Cognitive load:** The mental effort required by users to process information and complete a task.

**Competitive benchmarking:** Comparing the usability of a product or service against industry standards, similar organisations, or competitors.

**Consent:** Obtaining permission from research participants after providing them with relevant information about the study.

**Context:** Understanding the specific situations and environments in which users interact with a product, service or organisation.

**Contextual inquiry:** A research method involving direct observation of users in their natural environment.

**Customer experience journey map:** A visual representation of the entire user journey, including emotions, actions and touchpoints.

**Empathy mapping:** A team exercise that helps you to identify the thoughts and feelings of a particular group.

**Ethics:** Ethical considerations and guidelines for conducting research with human participants, ensuring their rights and privacy are respected. Ethics ensure a safe, comfortable, and respectful experience for your participants.

**Eye-tracking:** A research method that uses technology to monitor and record where users look on a screen or page.

**Focus group:** A small group of carefully selected participants who contribute to open discussions for research. Focus groups use group dynamics to get the shared experiences of similar people.

**Heatmap:** A visual representation of where users click or interact the most on a website or app.

**Heuristic:** A rule of thumb or guideline used to identify a product's common usability issues so that the problems can be resolved.

**Heuristic evaluation:** A method for identifying design problems and opportunities. It involves evaluating a website against established principles and good practices (heuristics).

**Information Architecture (IA):** The organisation and structure of content. This aims to make it easy for users to find what they need.

**Moderator:** A person who leads and facilitates user research sessions or interviews.

**Persona:** A fictional profile of a user group, based on research and data, which is created to better understand and empathise with their needs and behaviours. It is used to provide context to aid direction or decision-making.

**Prototype:** An early version or sample of a product or technology (such as a website) used for testing and evaluation before committing the resources to building the final version.

**Recruitment:** The process of inviting and selecting users to participate in research studies.

**Remote user testing:** Conducting user test sessions with participants who are not physically present, through online video calls and screen-sharing.

**Stakeholder interview:** A one-to-one conversation with a person who has a vested interest in the success of the product, service or strategy you're working on. Examples include other departments within your charity, an investor, a senior leader.

**Survey:** A structured questionnaire used to collect data from a large group of users.

**Target audience:** A group or individuals or entities that your organisation aims to reach and engage with. A defined segment of the broader population that shares characteristics.

**Tree testing:** An exercise that asks users to find items based on your website's navigation. This tells you how easily users can find information on your website.

**Usability:** How easy something (typically an interface) is to use. The extent to which a system, product or service can be used by specified users.

**User Interface (UI):** The space where interactions between humans and machines occur. Typically this term refers to the visual elements and design of a website or app, including buttons, menus, and layout.

**User journey:** The step-by-step process that a user takes to reach their goal. The term can be applied to different contexts, from a single visit to one website, to an entire experience with an organisation across multiple different interactions.

**User testing:** A research method that uses real people to evaluate a product or service by observing their interactions and gathering feedback. Also referred to as usability testing.

**Users:** An individual or group of individuals who interact with your organisation, products, systems, or services.

**UX Design:** User Experience Design. The process of designing products or services to provide a positive and meaningful user experience. Also referred to as user-centred design.

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